

**DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES
ADVISORY COUNCIL
ANNUAL REPORT
2005-2006**

Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of the major activities of the DDS Advisory Council for the 2005-2006 operating year. The Council continued in its primary roles of advisement, support, and Council oversight of DDS operations through regular meetings, committee meetings, and ongoing communication between the Council Executive and DDS administrative personnel.

Recommendations for the year 2004-2005 from the last annual report were:

1. *Continue to promote the need for alternate Council positions. The Council will continue to emphasize recruiting from diverse populations.*

Outcome: In July Mitzi Cheney was voted in as a new Council member. In January Marsha Rawlins was nominated as a new Council member. Her nomination is pending on approval by the Board of Education. Jeff Sheen was moved to an alternate position due to schedule conflicts that cause him to miss several DDS meetings a year. Additional recruitment of new members is ongoing. Phyllis Sharples has resigned from the DDS council due to health issues. The DDS council members wish her the best and a speedy recovery. DDS wants to thank Phyllis for her many years of service and strong leadership.

2. *Monitor impact of DMA on examiners as well as on Medical Consultants.*

Outcome: The Council, in conjunction with Gary Nakao, leadership received bi-monthly reports on DMA examiners progress towards the IDA – Independence Day Assessment. DMA examiners productivity slows from 13 cases a week to an average of 8 during the first 2 or 3 months. Since there has not been a year's data yet, we are waiting to see the real impact of DMA on examiner productivity. Some of the extra time required is a result of the requirement of having a DMA file and a paper file. Once the DMA file becomes the record of use, after IDA productivity will hopefully increase. The Medical Consultants continue to be an issue of concern. With the loss of several consultants the backlog continues to increase. Many Atiya a former DDS medical consultant has been assisting with backlog cases. Recently, the Regional Office has arranged to have the Louisiana DDS assist us with mental staffing.

3. *Continue to improve knowledge level of the Council relative to DDS operation through presentations by administrative and supervisory staff.*

Outcome: In January Rosanne Pitt, a DDS Supervisor, was asked to speak about the Homeless Project. It is an exciting process that is sponsored by State, County and community groups. There are two representatives from the DDS. The goal is to work out a process for the homeless to get their case work done before they move on. Gradi Jordan, DDS Examiner, did an on-line demonstration of the electronic process. In September Betty Thatcher, DDS Assistant Supervisor, gave an on-line demonstration of the DMA process. Esther Medina is the Liaison for the Utah DDS. The field office has an on-line quality assurance tool that pulls product for review. Ester will do these reviews. She is a resource that is available to resolve questions quickly. In July Esther also gave a presentation on the Medicare Part D Prescription Plan.

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4. *Continue in Council's role to educate the public by making presentations in our work group and with community organizations.*

Outcomes: Council members and DDS staff continue to make presentations regarding the disability program to groups as well as being a resource in their respective agencies or groups in which they are involved. Dave Carlson, our Medical Relations Officer and Esther Medina have made a number of presentations relating to the homeless initiative about the SSA disability program and its requirements. Gordon Richins reports monthly to OPTIONS for Independence Board of Directors as well as the Center for Persons with Disabilities Division Directors monthly staff meeting. Jeff Sheen also shares information about the disability program to others. In November, Phyllis gave a brief overview of the Homeless Goals Program. SSA teams of social workers and others work on the street with homeless individuals to help them expedite the claim process.

5. *Examine usage of the DDS phone line and evaluate continued need.*

Outcomes: The Council Secretary monitors the phone line and informs the Council of pertinent calls. There has not been a lot of activity for this over the past two years. The line has been discontinued for the present time, and if needed in the future it can be re-activated.

6. *Continued to monitor any information from Social Security regarding its definition of disability.*

Outcomes: There has not been any new information shared with the Council. Gary will up-date the council after attending the national meeting of DDS Administrators.

7. *Request a demonstration of the DDS electronic process be given to Council members.*

Outcomes: Two separate demonstrations were provided to the DDS Council by DDS Staff, Betty Thatcher in September 05 and Gradi Jordan in January 06.

Overview of Council Activities

The Advisory Council is comprised of persons from a range of constituent groups, including consumers, healthcare professionals, and representatives from agencies who provide services to consumers with disabilities. The Council meets on a regular basis in order to perform its primary functions of advisement, support, and oversight of Disability Determination Services (DDS) operations. Council members also serve as a conduit to the community by disseminating information concerning the rights of consumers with respect to DDS services. The Council has an excellent relationship with SSA nonvoting members that attend Council meetings which enhances overall Council activities and communications.

The Council meets on an every other month schedule, with meetings in January, March, May, July, September and November. Other sub-committee work is accomplished between bimonthly meetings.

Council Membership Changes for 2005-2006

In July Mitzi Cheney was voted in as a new Council member. In January Marsha Rawlins was nominated as a new Council member. Her nomination is pending on approval by the State Board of Education. Jeff Sheen was moved to an alternate position. Phyllis Sharples has resigned from the DDS council due to health issues. The DDS council members wish

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her the best and a speedy recovery. DDS wants to thank Phyllis for her many years of service and strong leadership.

Council Member Education

Council member education is a priority and conducted throughout the year. The Council is fortunate to have both Gary and Paul provide us with ongoing education in the area of the day to day workings of DDS. At each meeting Gary provides the Council with his Administrators report, which provides the Council with valuable information.

Esther Medina also reports to the Council on activities of SSA. Phyllis Sharples attended a training in Baltimore and returned with a report on the Homeless Project. Phyllis also attended a training on the Homeless Project made up of about forty Utah case managers in February.

Performance Review and Acknowledgement

Of special interest to the Council are the Administrator's Reports that are distributed at every Council meeting. These reports give the Council insight into national issues as well as local issues that affect the constituency of the Council. The main concerns coming from the Administrator's Reports and how they affect the DDS are as follows:

Staff Retention: As mentioned earlier, staff turnover generally and loss of examiners specifically has been concerning with its effect on case turnaround. This also applies to the turnover in Medical Consultants.

Backlog of Cases: Significant backlogs have occurred. Help from the Federal DDS office staff has greatly reduced backlogs early in the year. The backlog has increased again due to DDS examiners retiring, changing their employment, DMA conversions for some examiners, and Medical Consultants turnover. The count dropped from 1774 cases in September 2004 to 643 as of January 14, 2005. The backlog became under control in April 2005 and was reduced to 0. The backlog increased to 600 cases by January 2006. Another factor is mental staffing in January 2006 there were 16 drawers of cases where 2 drawers in the normal. Again the Council would like to thank DDS staff and staff from the Federal DDS, Denver Regional Office and other DDS's for working on this so diligently.

DMA: DMA (data management architecture)

The Council has continued to receive many updates on the status of DMA. Utah's DDS has significant advantages due to their strong systems and implementation staff. Using SSA language, DDS rolled out DMA on July 26, 2004 with three examiners and two consultants and then suspended expanding the numbers of examiners and consultants until the case backlog is under control. After getting the backlog under control DDS has ramped up DMA within the agency with 11 examiners converting to DMA in October and November 2005. This learning curve along with the loss of Medical Consultants has generated another backlog of 800 cases at the end of February. Based on examples from other states experiences with implementing DMA these difficulties happen and take time to work through. IDA's during the week of January 23, 2006 11 visitors conducted an Assessment Visit as part of the Independence Day Assessment (IDA).

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A Validation Visit has been scheduled for March 27, 2006 with DMA Certification to follow.

Acknowledgment: The Advisory Council would like to acknowledge Gary Nakao and Paul Clingo for their strong commitment to the Council. The Council is very grateful for their efforts to keep it informed of issues and their willingness to work with the Council to make DDS even better. It is the opinion of the Council that the Salt Lake DDS is run very well and works extremely hard to accomplish its goals.

The Council wants to congratulate Paul Clingo who received the Regional Commissioner's Citation Award for outstanding performance.

Additionally, the Council would like to also acknowledge our own Mark Smith who received a Director's Award for his years of advocacy service. He is the longest standing member of the Advisory Council. He has filled two-year, three-year, and four-year terms. His last term will end in June 2008. He is well respected in the advocacy arena.

The Council would like to acknowledge Gordon Richins for chairing the Annual Report Committee for the second year in a row and doing such a great job.

The Council would also like to thank our out-going Council Chair, Phyllis Sharples for her years of service and strong leadership. Mark Smith has accepted the Council Chair position. The Council would like to thank Mark for his hard work and leadership as in-coming Chair.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2005-2006

- Continue public outreach and education and documenting training/education events as we have done in the past.
- Review the new Regulations for the Disability Process Improvements when they are issued by SSA and providing any appropriate feedback. This is anticipated sometime after May 2006.
- Review and update the Council By-Laws. Last revised in 1999.
- Review and update the new Council Member Orientation manual.
- On-going education of Council Members regarding disability programs and issues through guest speakers regarding different parts of the disability program including Council Member affiliations and agencies, DDS functions such as Consultants or Examiners, Office of Hearings and Appeals, Field Office operations, etc.